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Government of the District of Columbia



**Office of the Deputy Mayor for  
Public Safety and Justice**

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Testimony of  
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Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice

***Public Oversight Hearing on the  
Forensics Laboratory Technician Training Program***

Committee on the Judiciary  
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chair  
Council of the District of Columbia

February 23, 2006

Room 412  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004  
10:00 A.M.

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Good afternoon Chairperson Mendelson and members of the Committee. I am Ed Reiskin, Deputy Mayor for Public Safety & Justice for the District of Columbia. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Forensics Laboratory Technician Training Program.

This program is a line item within the operating budget that currently funds ten personnel under the Metropolitan Police Department. Through this program, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) trains MPD laboratory examiners and technicians at the FBI Forensic Laboratory in Quantico, Virginia. The purpose of this program is to build analytic capacity within the District government to ultimately reduce or eliminate our reliance on the federal government in this area.

The ten personnel include four employees who conduct hair and fiber analysis and six who work in DNA analysis. Of the personnel who analyze hair and fiber evidence, two examiners and one technician have completed training and are producing sexual assault and homicide casework. The second technician in the hair and fiber analysis unit is scheduled to begin a six-to-eight week training course at the end of March.

The DNA analysis unit includes one dual-role Technical Leader/Examiner, two additional examiners and three technicians. Three of the staff are in training until the end of 2006 or beginning of 2007. Two others will start training this spring following the completion of background investigations. The current Technical Leader/Examiner has resigned effective March 18, 2006. Following the completion of training in mid-2007, the District will have five examiners and technicians qualified to produce DNA analysis casework. Prior to moving to the FBI Lab, MPD's forensic technicians have worked at MPD's Mobile Crime Laboratory facility to identify the present workload, determine the backlog of sexual assault and homicide cases, and define work processes. Since hiring for this program began in late 2004, retention has been an issue due to lengthy FBI background investigations and the level of administrative work needed to support the analytical work. We are currently exploring options for building an administrative infrastructure that would facilitate more efficient and productive casework.

According to the FBI, from January 2004 through November 2005, the District submitted 558 cases for forensic analysis. Of those cases, 366 were reported out, 96 profiles were entered into the national DNA database and hits were made on 44 cases. Additionally, the District has identified a total backlog of 3,600 sexual assault cases, 2,000 of which are within the sexual assault statute of limitations.

MPD is pursuing American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLAD/LAB) accreditation of its forensics unit at the FBI Laboratory by 2007. Accreditation is required for DNA profile entry into the national DNA database and for the pursuit of federal grants, is critical for credibility within the court system and among other labs, and is a way of monitoring quality systems for industry best practices. In addition to building in-house forensic expertise, I have reached out to forensic labs in other jurisdictions for assistance with DNA testing to

expand our capacity in the interim. The City of Baltimore has expressed interest in providing this assistance and to working with MPD this year to develop a Memorandum of Understanding for providing these services.

While the Technician Training Program provides vital support to the development of the District's forensic capabilities, our vision for the District's future does not stop there. During fall 2004 the District launched a capital project to construct a new multi-agency Consolidated Laboratory Facility to house our forensic and other critical laboratory functions. This facility appears in the capital budget as a project of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and was reviewed as part of the recent capital budget oversight hearing. While housed in the OCME capital budget, the Consolidated Lab will be a single state-of-the-art laboratory facility for Department of Health Public Health Laboratory, Metropolitan Police Department crime lab functions, and the entire operations of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

Forensic laboratory functions are crucial to the investigation of many deaths and to the investigation and successful prosecution of various types of crimes. Law enforcement, attorneys, the courts, and victims or their families rely on forensic analyses both to convict the guilty and exonerate the innocent. Tens of thousands of items of evidence are collected on thousands of scenes of violent crime within the District each year. Yet only a portion of the evidence collected is ever examined forensically. We have developed good relationships with the federal agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, that currently provide forensic lab services on a limited basis without cost to support MPD investigations. But by relying upon federal agencies for these services, however, the District has to compete with their priorities, available resources and time. Building the Consolidated Laboratory will ensure that the District can conduct in-house forensic analyses on a faster timetable to address its own priorities, such the backlog of sexual assault cases and homicides. Additionally, the District will be able to use DNA analysis for crimes that currently do not benefit from this service, such as property crimes and missing persons investigations. Further, co-locating MPD's crime lab functions and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will facilitate and expedite communication and coordination on crime and death investigations.

A third critical component of the proposed Laboratory is an enhanced public health laboratory. This laboratory is a vital tool to monitor and respond to public health concerns ranging from the identification of bioterrorism agents to disease surveillance to food safety and environmental health. As the nation's capital and a proven target of terrorism, the District must have the capacity within its borders to provide a rapid, thorough, and effective response to any bioterrorism threats. Additionally, as a first line of defense in the recognition of the spread of communicable diseases, the lab must have the space and capability to analyze all types of agents and toxins that could appear in our communities. The current Department of Health Public Health Laboratory facilities are 65 years old and co-located within an office building. The Public Health Lab also relies on the federal Centers for Disease Control and other labs outside of the District to supplement its analytic functions, which takes time. Once the Consolidated

Lab is built, the Public Health Laboratory can rapidly identify hazardous agents and provide clinical diagnostic support for hospitals with potential victims of biological, chemical or toxin exposures. To safely handle these types of agents, Bio-Safety Level 3 (BSL-3) containment facilities are required. Our current facilities cannot be upgraded beyond our current BSL-2 containment level due to lack of space and facility location.

Several of the District's critical laboratory functions are now performed in physically separated and outmoded facilities. The single best plan to rectify this serious deficiency is to create a consolidated facility for the District's death investigations and the laboratory assessment of forensic, biological and chemical evidence. Over the last year we have made significant progress in bringing this vision to life. We have completed programming for the Consolidated Lab, and determined that a building size of 300,000 square feet is needed to meet the District's needs. Multiple building sites have been formally evaluated as to suitability. We recently selected an architectural firm to design the facility. Construction for the Lab is currently estimated at \$200 million, and is expected to be completed by 2009, provided the District obtains all of the necessary funding. To date, the Consolidated Lab project has received \$17,265,000 in District (\$4,265,000) and federal (\$13,000,000) funding. We plan to continue pursuing additional federal support throughout the life of this project.

Construction of a state-of-the-art Consolidated Laboratory facility will greatly enhance the District's ability to expeditiously investigate crimes and respond quickly to threats to our public health threats. We will no longer be dependent upon federal laboratory resources and competing priorities. With the Consolidated Lab, the District will be in the forefront of the nation's cities in utilizing its own resources and expertise to protect the safety and quality of life of its residents and visitors. I am excited to be a part of this visionary project. I thank you for this opportunity to testify, and am happy to answer any questions on the Lab and the Technician Training program, which is a vital step towards achieving this vision.